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Three functions for the façade of Wells Cathedral: competition for the bishopric, liturgy and processions, and Heavenly Jerusalem

Alexandra Leigh Pearson
Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

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THREE FUNCTIONS FOR THE FAÇADE OF WELLS CATHEDRAL: COMPETITION FOR THE BISHOPRIC, LITURGY AND PROCESSIONS, AND HEAVENLY JERUSALEM

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

in

The School of Art

by
Alexandra Leigh Pearson
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Abstract

The façade of Wells Cathedral belongs among the most extraordinary church façades in all of England. An expanse of architectural and figural sculpture, the façade is one hundred fifty feet wide and originally included one hundred seventy-seven niches with full-length statues and ninety quatrefoils framing either a bust of an angel or a scene from the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. Above a height of seventy-five feet, a gable with figural sculpture and two towers top the façade. Such an elaborate façade is unique and begs the questions: by what means did Wells come to look as it did?

A key fact to understanding the façade is the notion that during the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries Wells was competing with Bath and Glastonbury for the bishopric of Somerset county, which it had formerly possessed. While the façade was an integral part of that campaign, it also provided other functions. It offered a setting for funeral processions and for the important liturgical pageantry that took place on Palm Sunday. Ultimately, these processions facilitated interaction between worshipers and the façade thereby enhancing the spiritual experience of the sacred place. Last, but not least, the plethora of sculpted figures transform the façade into a vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem foretold in the Apocalypse. In this thesis, I will describe, analyze, and interpret the sculptural program of the unique façade of Wells Cathedral in terms of its three functions—elevating local church history to help regain the bishopric, providing a backdrop for liturgical processions, and representing the Heavenly Jerusalem. Such an interpretation will demonstrate the importance of the Wells façade not only to the church community and to England but also to the history of medieval art and architecture.
Chapter 1: Introduction

The façade of Wells Cathedral belongs among the most extraordinary church façades in all of England. Consecrated in 1243, the church that stands today was constructed in a single building campaign that lasted approximately seventy years: the church was begun around 1175 and the façade commenced around 1220. An expanse of architectural and figural sculpture, the façade is one hundred fifty feet wide and originally included one hundred seventy-seven niches with full-length statues and ninety quatrefoils framing either a bust of an angel or a scene from the Old and New Testaments of the Bible (Figure 1). Above a height of seventy-five feet, a gable with figural sculpture and two towers top the façade. Such an elaborate façade is unique and begs the questions: by what means did Wells come to look as it does?

Figure 1. Wells Cathedral façade, 13th century, Wells, England
A key fact to understanding the façade is the notion that during the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries Wells was competing with Bath and Glastonbury for the bishopric of Somerset county, which it had formerly possessed. While the façade was an integral part of that campaign, it also provided other functions. It offered a setting for funeral processions and for the important liturgical pageantry that took place on Palm Sunday. Ultimately, these processions facilitated interaction between worshipers and the façade thereby enhancing the spiritual experience of the sacred place. Last, but not least, the plethora of sculpted figures transform the façade into a vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem foretold in the Apocalypse. In this thesis, I will describe, analyze, and interpret the sculptural program of the unique façade of Wells Cathedral in terms of its three functions—elevating local church history to help regain the bishopric, providing a backdrop for liturgical processions, and representing the Heavenly Jerusalem. Such an interpretation will demonstrate the importance of the Wells façade not only to the church community and to England but also to the history of medieval art and architecture.

In order to prove my thesis, I begin with the state of scholarship of Wells Cathedral, provide the historical backdrop that led to the cathedral’s construction, and describe the sculptural program of the façade. In Chapter Two, I discuss the statues filling the façade’s bottom and middle zones as devices to enhance the English church history at Wells. Chapter Three analyzes the façade and its resurrection tier and top gable in the terms of the processions that took place immediately in front of them. Chapter Four examines how the central scenes of the Virgin Mary and the top gable represent the Heavenly Jerusalem. The observations derived from this thesis will help to understand the impact of a carefully organized sculptural program on a religious community as well as the role of patronage in the construction of a medieval building.
State of the Scholarship

The earliest notable study of the façade of Wells Cathedral dates from the mid-nineteenth century and was completed by Charles Robert Cockerell, an English archaeologist, writer, and architect in the Royal Academy of London.\(^1\) In his book, *Iconography of the West Front of Wells Cathedral*, Cockerell sought to describe and identify every sculptural figure on the façade and made many drawings of the façade and its sculptures. Cockerell acknowledged possible mistakes, however, when he wrote, “any attempt to designate and describe all statues and sculptured figures would require a long dissertation and would necessarily be occupied with much conjectural reasoning.”\(^2\) He wrote with flowery language, but his descriptions and detailed drawings are a wealth of information as to the appearance of the façade before the more recent cleaning and reconstructions of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Indeed, it is important to have descriptions that were written before later conservation and restoration projects. Although some of his identifications have been discredited by more recent scholarship, his endeavor is still acclaimed. Cockerell was able to examine the façade closely, make thorough descriptions and drawings, and publish his discoveries in a book without much of the modern technology utilized today. His exhaustive work is admirable particularly in light of its early date.

In 1904, William Henry Saint John Hope and William Richard Lethaby studied the imagery and sculpture of the façade of Wells Cathedral and wrote an extensive article for

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\(^1\) Accounts from the fifteenth century by William Worcestre, seventeenth century by Lieutenant Hammond and Celia Fiennes, and eighteenth century by John Bowen and J. Carter were early attempts to describe the sculpture of the façade, but Cockerell was the first scholar to study Wells in great detail and to publish his findings. The early attempts before Cockerell were not relevant to this thesis.

the publication *Archaeologia*. The authors climbed on scaffolding put in place for preservation and restoration; Hope wrote about the imagery of the sculptures while Lethaby suggested identifications for some of the figures. The article includes a useful tool in studying the façade: a diagram of the west front along with the west, north, and east sides of the north tower, each niche either having a specific identification as an individual or a general identification as to the status or title of the figure (Figure 2).\(^3\) Not all of the statues can be identified today since many of the iconographic features were constructed from perishable materials like wood. Later scholars have added three additional identifications.\(^4\) The diagram with identifications of statues in Hope and Lethaby’s article was extremely useful in the early stages of my research of the façade.

Figure 2. Diagram of the Façade and North Tower of Wells Cathedral, © C. Malone

*Wells Cathedral: A History* was the first book to be written based on the archives of the cathedral edited by the cathedral archivist Linzee Sparrow Colchester in 1982. This book includes a history of the town of Wells and the entire cathedral compound with chapters on the history, construction, sculpture, and stained glass, as well as the more modern history of the last few centuries. Since this book was the first substantial chronicle


\(^4\) Carolyn M. Malone, *Façade as Spectacle: Ritual and Ideology at Wells Cathedral*. (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2004). The diagram included in Malone’s book has three additional identifications.
to be published since Hope and Lethaby’s article, it incorporated the advances made in the scholarship during the eight decades since 1904. Colchester compiled chapters important to my research by Dr. John Harvey, the medieval architectural historian, and Dr. Pamela Tudor-Craig, the adviser to the façade’s conservation program of the 1970s to 1980s. Since Colchester’s book was based on the archives of the cathedral, the study was thorough and included detailed archival prints, plans, and photographs to complement each chapter.

Wells Cathedral was also discussed in small sections of broader books on English Gothic art and architecture by Paul Binski and Peter Draper. Binski’s *Becket’s Crown: Art and Imagination in Gothic England 1170-1300* included the chapter devoted to Wells named “The Clefts of the Rock: Wells” while Draper’s *The Formation of English Gothic* included information on Wells Cathedral throughout his book encompassing English Gothic architecture. Binski’s chapter on Wells is included in the section on sanctification that focused on the typology of English sainthood and investigated the impact of the politics and aesthetics of sainthood on architecture. My research of the saints included on the façade was greatly indebted to Binski’s analysis. Binski devoted a section of the chapter on the patronage of Wells Cathedral, while Draper was concerned more with patronage as a whole. Draper evaluated the architecture of Wells Cathedral in terms that would have been understood by those for whom it was built and its patrons, by approaching the design of the church as a series of important decisions. In so doing, he attempted to understand the broad patterns of change between the experimental mid-twelfth century and the more conservative mid-thirteenth century. Draper’s discussion focused on buildings

\[\text{References}\]


thematically and placed them in the social and political context for which they were built.\(^7\) In a chapter written for the book *Artistic Integration in Gothic Buildings*, Draper focused solely on Wells with a similar approach to his own *The Formation of English Gothic*. Draper’s approach was important to my understanding of the role of the patron in the ideology behind the sculptural program of Wells.

Unlike Binski and Draper, whose books include many buildings, two books devoted to Wells Cathedral by Jerry Sampson and Carolyn Marino Malone endeavored to uniquely explain the façade in different but innovative fashions. Sampson’s book *Wells Cathedral West Front: Construction, Sculpture, and Conservation* analyzed the stone and paint of the cathedral in a scientific manner. Because he treated the building as a primary document, Sampson claimed that his book was not art or architectural history but a report on the archaeology of the façade. He discussed how the fabric of the building exhibited the way in which the building and the sculptures had been made and how the builders had intended it to appear.\(^8\) From the analysis of paint, stone, and façade design to a catalogue of the sculpture and finally to a determination of the meaning of the façade, Sampson presented and analyzed information collected during the restoration and conservation of the 1970s and 1980s. In the recent book, *Façade as Spectacle: Ritual and Ideology at Wells Cathedral*, part of the Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions series, Malone investigated the meanings of the iconography and motifs of the facade and concentrated on its liturgical, Eucharistic, and processional use. By deciphering the meaning of the façade during the 1220s and relating it to the medieval use of the term *spectaculum*—in this case,


monumental church architecture meant to impress the audience—Malone interpreted the façade and its sculpture as a public and permanent spectacle. She concluded that no façade fit the definition of *spectaculum* as clearly as Wells. Sampson’s thorough account and description of the individual sculptures gave me a good understanding of what Wells looked—and to some extent still does look—like, while Malone’s interpretation of the façade through English medieval liturgy helped me understand possible reasons for its construction.

As a result of the observations I have drawn from of the aforementioned studies of the façade at Wells, I have attempted to formulate a conclusion by researching, looking at images of the building, and reinterpreting the façade in terms of three important functions: enhancing the local English Church history to regain the bishopric, aiding liturgy and providing a backdrop for processions, and representing the Heavenly Jerusalem. After this brief excursus through the state of the scholarship, I turn now to the historical context in which Wells façade was built.

**Historical Backdrop**

The façade of Wells Cathedral is the culmination of almost a century’s long drudgery of patrons and workers. Many medieval historical events not only set the stage for the determination of the sculptural program but also account for the construction of the entire cathedral complex. In the early tenth century, Wells became the cathedral of Somerset then under Anglo-Saxon control. Ordered religious life began during Bishop Giso’s rule from 1061 to 1088. Following the Norman invasion, John of Tours, Giso’s successor, moved the see to Bath. This followed the Norman practice of moving bishoprics to larger towns and

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9 Malone, *Façade as Spectacle*. 
outfitting them with new cathedrals void of Anglo-Saxon features. Under Norman rule, Wells kept its status as a collegiate church but lost its vote in the episcopal elections. To further diminish the importance of Wells, the canons were forced to move away from the church and rent land. When the Cluniac monk Robert of Lewes became Bishop of Bath in 1136, he reversed the humiliation Wells suffered under John of Tours by reestablishing the community of canons under the leadership of a dean and regaining some of the land and endowments the cathedral owned before the Norman invasion. Robert stated that his motive was to remedy the “grievous oppression” which the church had suffered, but it is probable that he realized the value of having a cathedral in central Somerset—where Wells lies—rather than on the eastern border of Somerset where Bath lies. A charter by Pope Alexander III in 1176 gave voting rights back to Wells and decreed that any elected bishop would be enthroned at Bath and Wells. Bishop Robert’s diligence launched Wells’s return to prominence.

Although Robert had already begun repairing the Anglo-Saxon church at Wells, the construction of the present cathedral was begun under the bishopric of Reginald FitzJocelin de Bohun, who was elected in 1174 by both the chapter at Wells and the chapter at Bath. Around 1180, Reginald and the secular chapter of canons at Wells, in a push to recover the see, constructed a church—the future Wells Cathedral—adjacent to the site of the earlier

---

10 Rev. C.M. Church, *Chapters in the Early History of the Church of Wells A.D. 1136-1333*, (London: Barnicott & Pierce, 1894), 5-6. Previously, the canons had lived on owned land near the church.


12 Draper, “Interpreting the Architecture,” 121. The title “Bishop of Bath and Wells” was not adopted until Bishop Jocelin in 1219. See below, page 12.

13 Church, *Chapters in the Early History*, 43-44. The eight-year break between Bishops Robert and Reginald occurred because King Henry II kept sees vacant during his quarrel with Archbishop Thomas Becket.
Anglo-Saxon cathedral. Reginald, who resided at Wells, provided funds for the construction to begin on an open and clear site, and, since Wells was not a monastery, the masons were freed from the need to include monastic housing in the plan. Reginald also continued Robert’s earlier policies by increasing revenues, adding festival days, and making provisions for the new building’s fabric. The next bishop who came to power in 1191 was Reginald’s cousin, Bishop Savaric. Savaric was also a relative of Emperor Henry VI and a friend of King Richard I. An ambitious and extravagant bishop, Savaric used his connections to secure further funding and power by extending his control to include the nearby rich and powerful Glastonbury Abbey. Wells was dealt a hard blow when Bishop Savaric became the “Bishop of Bath and Glastonbury,” but this title was certainly more prestigious since Glastonbury claimed important relics, which I shall discuss below.

Indeed, one important disadvantage for Wells and its efforts to regain cathedral status was its lack of a relic cult. Jocelin Trotetman, a native of Wells and the next bishop upon his election in 1206, in order to offer an alternative to Glastonbury, turned to literary and sculptural sources—enter the Historiola and bishop effigies.

The Historiola (small history), principally contained Bishop Giso’s autobiography and accounts of the bishoprics of John of Tours and Robert of Lewes. The document begins in the eighth century when the cathedral of Somerset and town of Wells were given

14 Wells Cathedral had a permanent staff of fifty canons each owning a parcel of land for income. They did not live as communal monks.
15 Church, Chapters in the Early History, 58.
16 Savaric maneuvered and manipulated himself into this title. When King Richard became Henry VI’s prisoner, Savaric was appointed a ransom negotiator. He asked, as a condition of Richard’s release, that his control should include Glastonbury. The monks of Glastonbury were unwilling to submit to his authority leading to years of conflict that did not end until 1219 when Bishop Jocelin eliminated Glastonbury from the title.
17 Gransden, “History of Wells Cathedral,” 33. Although the information in the Historiola included history that primarily concerns the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the theme and factual content suggest that it was compiled in the early thirteenth century.
to Bishop Daniel from the Saxon King Ine who had moved the see from Congresbury.\textsuperscript{18} A succession of bishops is listed down to Giso of Wells, who after soliciting support from King Edward the Confessor and his Queen Edith, was consecrated in Rome and given apostolic authority. This is pivotal because the \textit{Historiola} demonstrates a local apostolic succession based at Wells.\textsuperscript{19} Bishop Jocelin used the Anglo-Saxon history of Wells Cathedral to compete with Glastonbury in the claim to recover the see. A few decades earlier, in the 1190s, at least seven tomb effigies of Anglo-Saxon bishops, including Daniel’s successor Sigarus, mentioned in the \textit{Historiola} were commissioned by their successor, Savaric, to mark the translation of the remains of the bishops to the new church (Figure 3). These effigies enforced the importance of the Anglo-Saxon heritage of Wells and should be understood as a response to Glastonbury’s claims to have discovered the relics of Saint Dunstan, Saint Patrick, and the tomb of King Arthur and his queen. With the production of the effigies, Wells also surpassed Bath in the number and workmanship of episcopal tombs. Binski suggested that: “serial representations of sculpted figures at Wells, as elsewhere in this time, could be implicated in an institution’s assertion of its own ancient identity.”\textsuperscript{20} In Chapter Two, I shall explore the episcopal effigies to the niches and statues on the façade, expounding upon Binski’s statement.

Ultimately, it took a native son to return Wells back to the head of the diocese. Jocelin, more than anyone, through an extensive building campaign and a carefully conceived sculptural program secured the status of Wells as a cathedral town. Jocelin was born in Wells in the 1160s and, while a clerk at Bath and a canon at Wells, he entered

\textsuperscript{19} Binski, \textit{Becket’s Crown}, 104.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 106.
the service of the court of the kings as a \textit{curiale}, or cleric whose career depended on the king. He influenced government both as a royal counselor and a judge.\textsuperscript{21}

\begin{figure}[ht]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{Figure3.png}
\caption{Stone effigies of Bishops Sigar and Giso, 12th century \hspace{1em} Wells Cathedral, England, © Courtauld Institute}
\end{figure}

In 1208, Interdict, a period in which church services and ceremonies were suspended, was served on King John and England.\textsuperscript{22} Jocelin, a supporter of the king, was unable to perform his duties and traveled to France in exile. Documentation places Jocelin in Melun and Mantes during the Interdict, so it is probable that he saw the sculpture of Chartres and Amiens, and might have witnessed the beginning of the construction of Rouen and Reims and the completion of Notre Dame in Paris, each of which may have given him ideas for the sculptural program of the façade of Wells. Upon the discontinuation of the Interdict in 1214, Jocelin returned to England, attended the signing of the Magna Carta, and

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Jocelin was not the only courtly bishop; Bishop Reginald had been involved in the court of Henry II and Savaric in that of Richard I.
\item Interdict was served on King John because he refused to accept Pope Innocent III’s appointment of Stephen Langton as Archbishop of Canterbury. King John was excommunicated by Pope Innocent III in 1211 for his persistent refusal of Langton. Excommunication was a serious blow to King John’s rule, since it would remove his subjects from their oath of allegiance and could allow the Barons to revolt, all leading to an attempted French invasion of England. The French were defeated, King John finally accepted Langton’s appointment in 1213, and his excommunication was reversed. The Interdict was officially lifted in 1214, but King John was fined 100,000 marks for losses he had caused the Church.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
helped to promote stability after King John’s death in 1216. He also dictated the coronation
oath of Henry III and was the head of justices from 1218 to 1219. He granted lands to
canons and was generous with his funds, giving endowments to his hometown of Wells. He
was the first bishop of Bath to issue a series of ordinances and a body of statutes for Wells
chapter.\(^{23}\)

Although Jocelin had the title Bishop of Bath and Glastonbury, Jocelin wanted the
see to be solely at Wells and, by petitioning Pope Honorius III, changed his title to “Bishop
of Bath and Wells” in 1219.\(^{24}\) Pope Honorius III presented no objection to the change in
title, since Wells had once been a see by apostolic privilege.\(^{25}\) As a native of Wells, Jocelin
had already begun construction of a bishop’s palace, deer park, and hospital in anticipation
of having the bishopric solely at Wells.\(^{26}\) Bishop Jocelin’s next step was to plan and
construct the façade. For this task, he hired master mason Adam Lock. The façade’s design,
including an expanse of historical and religious figural sculpture, fully emphasized the
desire of the people of Wells to have the cathedral again. The dreams became reality finally
in 1220.

\(^{24}\) Ibid., 28-33; Church, Chapters in the Early History, 57-58. The elimination of Glastonbury from
the title discontinued the conflict and fighting brought by the monks of Glastonbury, in which
Glastonbury tied up revenues in litigation in Rome. See these sources for more information on
the years of turmoil of Glastonbury.
\(^{25}\) Binksi, Becket’s Crown, 104; Gransden, “History of Wells Cathedral,” 33. As mentioned above, the
Historiola included the bishopric of the legendary Bishop Daniel who had been given Wells by King
Ine.
\(^{26}\) Deer parks were prevalent in English palace building. Palaces and cathedrals in England have the
luxury of being surrounded by seas of green grass as a frame for architecture. One reason for the
expanse of land around major architectural sites is the lack of defensive structures like moats. The
English relied on their status as an insular nation as their main defense. Jocelin’s deer park also
relates him to the courtly culture in which he participated, since deer parks were popular for
English kings.
Description of the Façade

The entire width of the façade of Wells Cathedral bursts with stone sculpture, both architectural and figural (Figure 1). The façade can be divided as a grid—two substantial stringcourses define three horizontal zones while a sequence of six buttresses provide a high degree of relief and create vertical rhythm. The lowest zone contains a zocle at the base and niches above, most of which are empty today, that stretch across the façade and around its towers. The buttresses and niches exhibit progressions and recessions causing the façade to appear to undulate. At the center, two small portals flank a larger portal that rises into the lowest tier of niches. Paired niches are contained within one larger arch; thin columns separate the pair and frame them. Gables top the paired niches and reach up to the lower stringcourse; quatrefoils fill the space of some of the gables while others are left empty. Quatrefoils are also contained in the spandrels of the gables. Many of the lower quatrefoils of the bottom zone are now empty, but some still contain sculpted angel busts, while the upper quatrefoils contain scenes from the Bible. The Old Testament scenes are ordered chronologically from the center southward (to the right); the New Testament scenes proceed from the center northward (to the left and around the north tower). The central portal forms a pointed arch, and above the door in the arch is a large quatrefoil that frames a sculpture of the seated Virgin Mary with Christ flanked by censing angels. Above the central pointed arch is a gabled trefoil arch supported by thin Corinthianesque columns that contains another representation of the Virgin Mary and Christ, this time a Coronation of the Virgin. In both of these scenes, the original heads of the figures are missing.

The middle zone of the façade framed by the dominant horizontal stringcourses, contains two tiers of gabled niches framing figural sculptures that rise up the façade like trees growing out of the ground. The sculptures represent many historical figures
including popes, bishops, royalty, nobles, and monks—not as many of the niches are empty as in the bottom zone. The center of the façade has three large lancet windows that mimic the tall, paired blind arches between the flanking buttresses.

These buttresses provide more surface area for sculpture—in fact, gabled niches with statues fill all three sides of the six buttresses. Tall and thin columns mark and highlight the corners of each buttress, one directly on the corner and two around each side of the buttress that also visually support the gables of the niches. Although the gables of the bottom zone each include two niches, the gables of the middle zone crown a single trefoil arch that frames a niche with a statue.

At the top of the middle zone just under the upper stringcourse, the resurrection tier stretches along the entire façade. Trefoil arcading with floral decoration runs across the top of the tier, and the angled roofs of the gables of the windows, blind arches, and niches become “tombs” from which figures rise (Figure 4). The resurrected, in all states of awakening, show no signs of struggle or pain.

The third and highest zone is comprised of the top gable that crowns the center of the façade and includes three tiers (Figure 5). The lowest tier comprises an arcade; each of the nine niches contains one of the nine orders of angels. Flanking the arcade, but on the inside of the buttresses, two multi-foil niches shelter two trumpeting angels (Figure 6). The middle tier includes an arcade with twelve niches for the twelve apostles. On the highest tier of the top gable is a mandorla surrounding Christ and two flanking trefoil arches with two seraphim, although the flanking niches are believed to have once contained the Deesis.27 Today, the damage done to the central sculptures of the Seated

27 A consensus among scholars is that the niches flanking Christ originally contained the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist, better known as the Deesis. This trio was very common in medieval
Virgin and Child, the Coronation of the Virgin, and Christ in Majesty in the top gable has been repaired making the sculptures complete, though not original. The turrets that cover the top gable as well as the two massive towers on each side of the façade are later additions, which provide framing devices for the highest zone of the façade.  

Figure 4. Resurrection tier at the top of the middle zone, detail Wells Cathedral, © Courtauld Institute

Figure 5. Top Gable Wells Cathedral © Courtauld Institute

Figure 6. Trumpeting angle from the buttress of the top gable, Wells Cathedral © Courtauld Institute

religious art. All the statues in the top gable were a later addition placed in the gable in the fifteenth century. After Jocelin’s death in 1242, funding was too low to complete the gable as planned. The seraphim were only placed in the flanking niches in the restoration campaign of the 1970s-1980s.  

Malone, *Facade as Spectacle*, Figure 4. The towers and turrets of the topmost gables were not part of the original plan. Instead, the plan originally called for large spires to top each end of the façade instead of towers. The spires were never constructed, and later funding allowed the towers to be built. See Malone’s Figure 4 for a hypothetical reconstruction.
The façade represents the history of the world, a theme also common on French church façades.29 The bottom zone, representing the “past,” contains figures and scenes from the Old and New Testaments. The middle zone, representing the “present,” includes historical figures and those current to the façade's construction. The “present” represented on the façade of Wells means Christian history, and although the “past” includes scenes from Christian history, here the bottom zone overall references Jewish history. The resurrection tier also belongs to the “present” as the figures are rising from their tombs but have not yet ascended into heaven. The top gable represents the “future”—the Second Coming of Christ, an event medieval people thought imminent. The nuances of the sculptural program of the façade I have just described will be expounded upon in all three chapters of my thesis. I turn first to the niches of the bottom and middle zones and the Biblical quatrefoils that helped Wells regain its cathedral status.

29 For example: Amiens and Reims.
Chapter 2: Competition for the Bishopric

To regain the see, church officials at Wells had to compete with Bath and Glastonbury. Bath was not willing to budge since it was backed by a strong community of monks and had gained the see after it was removed from Wells by the Normans. A formidable opponent, Glastonbury was rich and powerful, and its leaders claimed to have discovered the remains of Saint Dunstan and King Arthur. In order to provide a compelling alternative to these two towns, Bishop Jocelin translated the ideas behind the Historiola and the episcopal effigies inside Wells into a church façade that emphasized the legacy of Wells to English Church history. In this chapter, I will analyze the statues filling the niches of the façade and explain how the Early Christian figures and Biblical quatrefoils helped elevate the importance of Wells within English Church history.

Sacerdotium and Regnum

The center of the façade provides a separation of sorts for the niches in all zones. The niches south of the center hold mostly religious figures (sacerdotium) while the niches north of the center contain royal figures (regnum). Cockerell thought this distinction important during his investigation of the figures.\(^{30}\) A closer look at the façade niches reveals that this separation is not absolute; there are kings on the sacerdotium side, and priests and popes are found on the regnum side. In fact, the façade south of the center includes mostly bishops, monks, hermits, and prophets, but also includes a seated king and lady as well as empty niches with unknown inhabitants. Likewise, the niches of the north end of the façade include many more royal figures, but quite a few religious figures also—saints, New Testament disciples, and a seated bishop. Niches with figures also wrap

\(^{30}\) Cockerell, Iconography of the West Front.
around the north tower to the east side where more mixed royal and religious figures are found in both bottom and middle zones (Figure 7).

![Figure 7. North face of Wells Cathedral showing north porch entrance and scenes and figures that wrap around the north tower](image)

Although not all of the figures have personal identifications, the status of many of the figures can be determined. Also, out of the sixty-two niches on the bottom tier, only nineteen figures remain—most of which are on the north and east sides of the north tower—so it is not possible to determine beyond doubt what type of figures once occupied these niches.31 The remaining figures of the bottom tier include religious figures—prophets in the far south and disciples, deacons, preachers, and women to the north. While

31 The figures of the bottom tier were destroyed by Oliver Cromwell and his followers during their destruction of art in the English Civil War of the seventeenth century. One method to deduce the identities of the missing statues would be to intensively study similar sculptural programs of English churches influenced by Wells such as Exeter Cathedral from the mid-fourteenth century; this route is beyond the scope of this thesis.
Cockerell seemed to be on the right track, due to some of his misidentifications, he was not correct in his observation of the total separation of *sacerdotium* and *regnum*.³² Although absolute separation does not occur, the figures seem to be grouped in a coherent fashion. Deacons and preachers are grouped together on the north tower, four ladies and disciples cluster around the northwest corner of the north tower, bishops, monks, and prophets occupy the south end, and kings seem to be grouped similarly on the north end and around the north tower. The division is not absolute along the lines of complete separation of *sacerdotium* and *regnum*. Instead, the separation of the Old and New Testament quatrefoils, mentioned in the brief description in Chapter One, might suggest that the figures of the bottom tier were separated on the basis of Testament.³³

One explanation for the mixing of *sacerdotium* and *regnum* could be Bishop Jocelin’s role in the royal government courts of John and Henry III as a *curiale*.³⁴ Indeed, many bishops held government positions alongside their obligations to the Church. My investigation entails identifying who the statues represented and why they were chosen to enliven the façade.

*Sacerdotium*

The religious figures include saints, bishops, popes, martyrs, abbots and abbesses, monks, prophets, disciples, deacons, preachers, and hermits. The two niches to the far south that house prophets and the two niches to the far north side that house disciples are the only niches with figures left on the bottom zone. The niches of the bottom tier that

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³² Sampson, *Wells Cathedral West Front*, 151. For example, Cockerell misidentifies a bearded monk as Eadburga, daughter of Edward the Elder.
³³ Ibid., 157.
³⁴ Malone, *Façade as Spectacle*, 201-202. Service by bishops also influenced the thirteenth-century discourse of *sacerdotium* and *regnum*. Bishops were thought of as better officials than laymen. Bishops also thought of their service to the royal government as a way to evangelize the laity. To contrast this to a contemporary idea, the mixing of “church and state” is hotly debated today.
wind around the corner of the north tower were less damaged. Preachers, disciples, and four ladies including Mary Magdalene occupy the bottom niches; the east side of the projecting tower parallel to and behind the façade includes five deacons and three empty niches. Other than a seated priest, seated pope, standing pope, and seated bishop on the buttress faces north of the façade’s center, the religious figures of the middle zone are all to the south of the center. Here, seven seated bishops occupy the bigger and more prominent niches on the fronts of the buttresses. The priests, popes, and bishops hold books, crosiers, or give a gesture of blessing (Figure 8).

Most of the religious figures lack identification, but their style of dress easily denotes their status—bishop, abbot, priest, king, et cetera. No two are alike, so each possibly represented a specific person living during the cathedral’s construction; however, no identifications have survived. One exception is Mary Magdalene, surrounded by three other ladies, one of whom is possibly the Virgin Mary (Figure 9). Mary Magdalene holds a jar of ointment, while the men around the northwest corner of the tower hold books. The grouping of the men around the Marys suggests that they are New Testament disciples, which corresponds to the New Testament story quatrefoils above them. The rest of the figures on the north and east sides of the north tower are preachers and deacons. The deacons wear thirteenth-century vestments while the New Testament preachers wear togas (Figure 10). A seated priest above the deacons dressed in a maniple, almice, alb, and dalmatic holds a book and points down to the deacons. According to Sampson, the priest could be Stephen since he was the first of seven deacons chosen in Acts 6: 1-5 and a

35 Sampson, Wells Cathedral West Front, 261-2.
36 Malone, Façade as Spectacle, 145 n. 47. The juxtaposition of the New Testament preachers and deacons is appropriate since the order of deacons was chosen in Acts 6:3.
Figure 8. Bishops Wells Cathedral © Courtauld Institute

Figure 9. Mary Magdalene with 3 other ladies on north tower Wells Cathedral

Figure 10. Deacons on North Tower Wells Cathedral
proto-martyr. The seated priest, bishops, and popes on the buttress faces appropriately wear albs, amices, chasubles, and maniples. Even without identifications, iconographical features such as clothing and gestures and, in some cases, the relationships of one figure to another can identify their types. By including important historical religious figures, Jocelin related the contemporary and local church to the history of Christianity.

This relationship becomes more strongly accentuated by the statues on the façade that have been positively identified. Lethaby suggested identifications to many of the religious figures on the north end by their treatment, iconography, and the relationship of one statue to another. From the center outward his identifications were: Saint Alban, knight and hermit Saint Godric of Finchale, Saint George who holds a sword, Archbishop of Canterbury Saint Thomas Becket who holds a crown, Archbishop of Canterbury and Abbot of Bath Saint Elphege, Saint Amphibalus, brother and sister Bishop Erkenwald and Abbess Ethelberga of Barking, and the early Christian martyr husband and wife Theopistis and Eustace, who holds two children. Two other important identifiable religious figures deserve mention here, although they will be analyzed closely in Chapter Four: King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba who occupy the niches directly above the central portal tympanum enclosing the Coronation of the Virgin. Their bodies turn to each other; from the Queen of Sheba’s belt hangs a purse, ink bottle, and pen case; Solomon’s head turns sharply towards her as if to speak. As for the remaining unidentified figures, the original painting of the façade as well as perishable accoutrements would have certainly helped

37 Sampson, Wells Cathedral West Front, 158.
38 Hope and Lethaby, “Imagery and Sculptures,” diagram of church in appendix. For indications of individual iconography see pages 155-160.
39 Ibid., 177. King Solomon and Queen of Sheba at Wells are very similar to the same subjects at Amiens, Chartres, Reims, and other non-English churches. Lethaby identified these figures without a doubt and the identifications are not questioned.
identify more figures were they still extant. Not all of the religious figures are of English origin—the mixing of important English saints with early saints in Christian history became a way to emphasize the significance of the Church in England.

A prevalent group of religious figures on the façade are the bishops, which closely resemble the stone effigies inside the cathedral (Figure 3). These effigies were commissioned around 1200 when the tombs of the early Wells Bishops were translated from the preceding Anglo-Saxon building. If the effigies stood on end rather than horizontally so as to cover a tomb, the visual similarities to the niches and figures would be obvious. Actually the composition of the figures and arches above their heads resemble the arched niches and statues. Much of the workforce of the facade is thought to have had experience in smaller sculpture, perhaps like the effigies sculpted a few decades before the façade. In fact, gabled niches were not common to architectural sculpture before Wells, rather they were prevalent on shrines, tombs, and choir screens, including the effigies of the bishops. The adoption of motifs from effigies transformed the façade into a monumental shrine full of quatrefoils, gabled niches, and full-length statues of important historical characters, whether sacerdotium or regnum.

40 One would expect some figures to could include the king, pope, bishop, and dean living at the time of completion. The twelve apostles were not omitted. They are located in the top gable atop the façade. It is possible that apostles were also among the statues that were destroyed from the bottom tier. Since two prophets remain in the bottom tier on the south end under scenes from the Old Testament and New Testament figures such as Mary Magdalene occupy the niches under the northern New Testament scenes, it is not a far leap to assume that apostles could have occupied more of the empty niches on the north end.

41 Malone, Façade as Spectacle, 28-9. Malone elaborates on the experience of Adam Lock and his synthesis of three architectural traditions of southern England in planning the façade of Wells. The three traditions were also influenced by metalworking and choir furnishings.
By combining the historical religious figures with significant Anglo-Saxon kings, queens, and nobles, Bishop Jocelin aimed to heighten the importance of the history of the English Church. The royal figures consist of kings, queens, nobles, knights, warriors, and ladies.

The three royal statues found on the south and religious end include a seated king, widow, and queen. Larger seated kings inhabit the six buttress faces along with the seated bishop, popes, and priest mentioned. Many of the kings hold charters, which could represent the Magna Carta or other similar document (Figure 11).

Hope and Lethaby suggested that they could represent special benefactors like Edward the Confessor or Richard I. In contrast, Binski pointed out a connection to the Historiola: if the charters represent grants of land or privilege, one of the seated statues possibly represents King Ine, who gave Wells to Bishop Daniel.42

Martyred kings play an especially important role in the history of the Anglo-Saxons and in the desire of Wells to regain the see. After the Norman invasion and transfer of the see of Somerset to Bath, the significance of the Anglo-Saxon church diminished. Bishop Jocelin saw the glorification of the Anglo-Saxon saints on the façade as a route to recoup the

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42 Hope and Lethaby, “Imagery and Sculptures,” 156; Binski, Becket’s Crown, 118.
church’s importance. The Anglo-Saxon “suffering leaders” dominate the upper niches of the northern end and north tower; many are close to the center. Lethaby suggested six identifications for these Anglo-Saxon kings. From the center outward they are: Edmund, Edwin, Edward the Confessor, Kenelm, Oswald, and Ethelbert. Malone later identified three: Oswyn, Ethelred, and Wistan. By placing them at the right side of Christ at the apex of the top gable, Jocelin emphasized the sanctity of the martyred kings and brought the Anglo-Saxon past of Wells to the forefront.

To further enhance the importance of the history of Wells, the sculptural program includes an allegorical device: the larger niches with the seated kings, along with the seated noble, popes, bishops, and Stephen on the faces of the buttresses related them to supporting the church (Figure 12). They are more visible than the smaller statues on the façade and are larger on account of their hierarchical importance. By placing them on the faces of the buttresses, the larger figures physically— and ideologically— buttress Wells.

![Figure 12. Example of a Buttress with Saints Edward and Kenelm on side and Seated Man on face, Wells Cathedral, © Courtauld Institute](image)

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43 The medieval English took pride in the glorification of their saints since they claimed a sainted King, Edward the Confessor.
45 Hope and Lethaby, "Imagery and Sculptures," appendix diagram; Malone, *Façade as Spectacle*, Figure 56 diagram. An investigation into why each king was chosen is beyond the scope of this thesis.
As a way to envision the figures of the façade as a whole, Binksi coined the phrase the “Chorus of Sainthood,” an appropriate name since music and singing were an important ephemeral element of the façade to be discussed in Chapter Three. The figures on the façade show a similarity to representations of church choruses in manuscripts. Binksi gave an example from the “Chorus of the Virgins” in the Benedictional of Saint Æthelwold from the late tenth century, which displays confessors and virgins in a group under an arch with the label CHORVS (Figure 13). The illumination displays seven women set into a pair of arches under a larger single arch. Some hold books and the center woman raises her hand in praise. In the tympanum of the larger arch an angel is framed by a circle, which shows a marked affinity to the angel quatrefoils in the gables of the bottom tier of figures at Wells (Figure 1). The arrangement of singers in an arch, like the bishop effigies, could have been a source for the design of the niches of Wells. By organizing the figures in the manner of the illumination in the Benedictional of Saint Æthelwold, a famous Anglo-Saxon bishop and saint, Jocelin stressed another connection to Anglo-Saxon religious traditions.

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46 Binksi, Becket’s Crown, 117.
47 The similarity to the “Chorus of the Virgins” is standing figures under arches with angels in the tympana. The bishop effigies are single figures, not a group, under trefoil arches (in some cases). Smaller art works such as the manuscript and the effigies, or a combination of them, could have been sources for the design of the Wells niches.
Until the End Time

The entire expanse of religious and royal saints portrays a history of the church, from Jewish Old and New Testament figures and early Christian martyrs to Anglo-Saxon martyred kings and current English bishops and deacons. By connecting the more contemporary English figures to early Christian and Jewish figures, Jocelin highlighted the link between the current English church and Christian history thus underscoring the importance of the Church in England. Cockerell, who studied the façade closely, wrote adoringly about the statues:

The fullness and embodiment which sustains the *dramatis personae* throughout, with an untiring energy of impersonation in costume, symbol, and action...We have the sanctity of the Monk, the meekness and abstraction of the supreme Pontiff, the Archbishop, the pious energy of the Bishop in the act of benediction, the prudent Abbot, the devoted Anchorite, the haughty and imposing King, the stark conqueror fiercely justifying his usurpation, the placid and impassible Confessor administering his good old laws...the comely gallant prince and lover, the devout Nun, the majestic Queen...the inspired Evangelist...each and all discovering a racy energy of conception...  

Cockerell’s account, comprehensive and with vivid language, almost brings the figures to life. A description of this kind gives the figures natural and lifelike characteristics that would have been understood to Jocelin and churchgoers at the completion of the façade. Lifelike features, combined with the elements of sound to be examined in the next chapter, not only enhanced the façade but also added an extra level of wonder to Wells Cathedral.

Near contemporary French church facades such as the one at Reims purport to display an encyclopedic version of the world through full-length statues, sculptures of Bible stories, and scenes of secular learning and daily activities. Wells displays history in a slightly different format—rather than exhibit an encyclopedic history of the world, the façade brandishes important historical figures to Church history along with the quatrefoils.

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of Old and New Testament scenes (Figure 14). As discussed above, the niches with statues have areas devoted to the early church, the Anglo-Saxon descent of kings and bishops, and figures contemporary to the façade’s construction. Fifteen of the eighteen Old Testament scenes have survived; they run from the center to the south end of the façade and display scenes of the history of the Old Law of Adam, Abel, and Noah from the book of Genesis. Twenty of the twenty-five New Testament scenes remain; they run from the center northward and exhibit a history of the Gospels through the life and ministry of Christ from birth to ascension. Since the New Testament scenes continue around the north tower, the New Testament narrative is longer than the one from the Old Testament. Although all of the remaining Old Testament scenes can be found in Genesis, no one Gospel is the single source for the New Testament scenes.

Figure 14. The Creation of Adam Wells Cathedral, © Courtauld Institute


50 Ibid. The remaining New Testament scenes are John the Evangelist or an Angel, The Nativity, The Return from Egypt, Christ disputing with Doctors, The Calling of John the Baptist, The Preaching of John the Baptist, Christ in the Synagogue, Christ in Simon’s house, The Feeding of the Five Thousand, Christ with nine people, The Transfiguration, The Entry into Jerusalem, Judas and the High Priest, The Last Supper, Christ before the High Priest, Christ before Pilate, The Scourging, Christ bearing His Cross, The Resurrection, and The Ascension. The empty quatrefoils could have been damaged by reformers during the seventeenth century English civil war that destroyed many of the statues on the bottom tier. Any scene that could have been seen as apocryphal, for example the central Coronation of the Virgin, would have been a target for the reformers.
The New Testament scenes in the quatrefoils emphasize preaching and teaching.\textsuperscript{51} The emphasis placed on preaching and teaching might relate to the Cistercian discourse familiar to England by the thirteenth century. Saint Bernard, founder of the Cistercian order, did not see the advantage of having sculpture full of deformity in the areas for use of the monks. The goal of teaching in many cases caused a general movement of sculpture to the exterior of a church, especially to a façade. Although Wells is not a Cistercian abbey, Saint Bernard’s sermons were popular in England and could have been in the minds of the builders. Actually, Jocelin went a step further to agree with Saint Bernard’s distaste for the scenes of monsters and deformity by excluding scenes of suffering and healing in the sculptural program.\textsuperscript{52} Teaching and preaching were important to Jocelin and thereby related the façade to the sermons given to the faithful inside the church. These scenes from the New Testament that portray teaching and preaching also relate to the preachers and deacons in the niches below.

Some commonalities occur throughout the scenes and bring to mind the salvation that comes through the Church. Many scenes reference different versions of Christ and of the Church. For example, Christ corresponds to Adam, as he is referred to as the “New Adam.” Eve stands for the Church, as she was born from Adam’s side as the Church was born from Christ. Noah, another version of Christ, saved humankind from the flood, in a similar way that salvation comes through baptism. References to salvation through the Church emphasize the idea of the Triumph of the Church traditionally used in medieval English sermons to instruct the worshipers. Christ feeding the Five Thousand prefigured the Eucharist, and Mary anointing Christ’s feet in Simon’s House reminded the faithful of

\textsuperscript{51} Christ’s miracles in the New Testament quatrefoils do not include such common healing scenes as the Healing of the Paralytic or Raising of Lazarus.

\textsuperscript{52} Cockerell, \textit{Iconography of the West Front}, xxi-xxii.
serving and worshiping Christ. Another common thread running through the quatrefoils is found in the images that curve around and cut through the corners of the buttresses (Figure 15). The buttresses appear pierced rather than solid, emphasizing the ideological support of the men of the Church. This only strengthens the idea that the figures on the buttresses brace the church. As a whole, the Old and New Testament quatrefoils highlight the ideas that salvation and support are gained through the Church.

By combining the scenes of the history of Genesis and the Gospels in the quatrefoils with the men and women of the early Christian and English Church in the niches, the façade becomes a representation of the history of the Church, rather than of the whole world as found in contemporary French churches such as Chartres. Churches in France are more an encyclopedic version of the world that included secular scenes such as the zodiac, daily tasks and jobs, and the liberal arts. The inclusion of the Anglo-Saxon bishops and kings with Jewish and early Christian figures provides the history displayed on Wells with a uniquely English slant. When the history recounted in the niches and quatrefoils is conjoined with the Second Coming foretold in the top gable—a topic of exploration for Chapter Four—the future is included with the past and present of the bottom and middle zones respectively. In sum, the façade of Wells Cathedral displays the history of the Church from the beginning to the end of time.

Figure 15. The Fall, Wells Cathedral © Courtauld Institute

53 Malone, Façade as Spectacle, 56-57.
Chapter 3: Liturgy and Processions

Processions played an important role in medieval church liturgy. Although many processions occurred throughout the year, the façade of Wells was conceived as a backdrop or *scaenae frons* for two elaborate liturgical processions: funerals and Palm Sunday.\(^{54}\) The use of the doors on the façade during procession added to the façade’s relationship to the processions. As a backdrop for the panoply of the liturgy and for the display of the dramatic processions of Wells and the English church, the façade drew worshipers into attendance, incited emotional responses and provided a venue for part of the processions to take place.\(^{55}\) In this chapter, I will explain the relationship of the façade to funeral processions to and from the lay cemetery, analyze how the façade enhanced Palm Sunday procession stations, and examine the façade’s connection to the regular masses and Eucharist distribution in the church.

Burial of the Dead

The cemetery for privileged laity had a direct view to the façade and all of its sculpture. In the planning stages, Jocelin anticipated the audience to occasionally be funeral attendees. The cemetery, arranged in the southern part of the lawn to the west of the façade, was small and mainly used for the burial of the clergy’s family and servants. The clergy were buried in the cloister to the south of the cathedral and the citizens of Wells

\(^{54}\) *A scaenae frons* is a theater backdrop dating to ancient Roman plays. Although an architectural and sculptural object originally, the *scaenae frons* inspired many backdrops depicted in mosaics and painting. Other processions at Wells include Ascension, Pentecost, Rogation Days, St. Mark's Day, and Ash Wednesday and Maundy Thursday when penitents were cast out and received back in. A connection can be made between the two processions discussed here—Palm Sunday marks the beginning of the funeral procession of Christ.

\(^{55}\) The use of the façade to aid in the spectacle of the liturgy and processions is stressed in Malone's book, *Façade as Spectacle.*
at the parish church of Saint Cuthbert’s.⁵⁶ After the façade’s consecration in 1243, elm trees were planted in the southeast corner of the lawn in front of the façade between the cemetery and the façade so that the graves would not impede any liturgical processions (Figure 16).⁵⁷ A major subject on the façade, resurrection, was appropriate for the mourners at the burials that took place in the lay cemetery below.

![Figure 16. Hypothetical Reconstruction of a Funeral Procession](image)

56 Similarly, at Reims Cathedral in France, the façade faces the canon’s cemetery. Connections between burial and the sculptural program on the Reims façade can be made as well.  
57 Anne Crawford, Wells archivist, e-mail message to author, February 9, 2009. In the seventeenth century, burials ceased and the area changed into a fashionable landscaped space with lawns and avenues, which is what is seen today.
Nothing so fully accentuates the theme of Resurrection than the resurrection tier at the top of the façade under the top gable (Figure 4). The figures rise out of their graves with expressions of joy or amazement—instead of sadness or suffering—in response to the trumpets that signal the Second Coming (Figure 17). Christ in Majesty in the top gable above the resurrected figures signals that the risen have been chosen to ascend to heaven upon Christ’s return. Sampson suggests that the sculptors planned to have the resurrection tier wrap around the corners of the façade towers making room for 144 rising figures; the 144 figures represent the 144,000 chosen to inhabit the Heavenly Jerusalem. However, there are only 111 extant figures in eighty-four niches, leaving twenty-four niches empty.

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58 Sampson, *Wells Cathedral West Front*, 189. The 144,000 represent 12,000 of the 12 tribes of Israel chosen by God.
The figures represent all states of society and stages of rising; they are nude, but some have crowns, tonsures, or mitres to denote their identities. In fact, Jocelin might be one of the bishops rising from his tomb (Figure 18).<sup>59</sup> Almost half of the figures are pushing back their coffin lids.<sup>60</sup> Many look up in wonder, couples reunite, and some are shown simply holding their hands in prayer. No one is shown in the pain of Judgment—these are the people chosen to ascend to the Heavenly Jerusalem.<sup>61</sup> Since they are still in the state of rising, they still belong to the present and appropriately belong in the middle zone rather than the future on the top gable.

As funeral processions exited a portal of the façade en route to the cemetery a short distance from the façade, they advanced in the shadow of Christ in Majesty, angels, the risen dead, and the community of saints. The doors of the porch on the north wall of the nave—not of the façade—were used on a daily basis, so passing through the façade’s doors brought special and exceptional meaning to the day or procession. During the procession to carry the body to the cemetery for burial, the clergy led the mourners in song and prayer.<sup>62</sup> The laypeople were buried perpendicular to the façade, their feet to the east where Christ would appear at the Second Coming. Their mourners, in deep grief, could

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<sup>60</sup> Sampson, <i>Wells Cathedral West Front</i>, 191. The coffin lids correspond to the roofs of the gables below. Although the gable roofs make lids for the coffins, it was not positively designed that way. Some of the sculptures show signs of being reworked to fit in the allotted space. Most of these occur on the north and south towers. The numerals carved into each block as a marker show that some were placed in a different order from the plans. Sampson gives details as to which sculptures were trimmed or refitted and where.

<sup>61</sup> In the New International Version, 1 Thessalonians 5:16 reads, “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.”

<sup>62</sup> Richard Rutherford, <i>The Death of a Christian: The Order of Christian Funerals</i> (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1989), 70-71. Rutherford lists songs and prayers common after 1260. Due to variations from country to country and church to church, it is unknown what particular songs and prayers were said during all of the burials at Wells Cathedral except closing with the Lord’s Prayer.
look directly to the sculpture-filled façade and ponder upon its message of resurrection and joy. As the commemoration of the departed loved ones progressed, the representation of the past, present, and future Church would remind the faithful of the promise of everlasting life with Christ after the Second Coming in the Heavenly Jerusalem. After the dead were interred, their families and friends were perpetually reminded by the presence of the façade of their loved ones’ return to the Heavenly Jerusalem that awaits.

**Palm Sunday**

One day each year, worshipers in Wells would take part in an array of liturgical pomp during which the façade would come to life. The Palm Sunday procession, still practiced today, reenacted Christ’s Entry into Jerusalem, but also marked the beginning of Holy Week, the time of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. The function of the façade was not merely as a backdrop for the procession, which took place on the green, but rather when the façade doors were entered, the façade itself was transformed into the city gate of Jerusalem. As I shall discuss shortly, the façade also provided a screen from within which a choir of men and boys would sing, thereby creating an extra level of sensory awe.

Christian processions, including Palm Sunday, were based on the ancient Roman adventus, which celebrated the arrival of an emperor. Early Christians adopted many practices already prevalent in society for continuity and for the ease of Christian conversions. Adventus means arrival or entrance; the Roman emperors accompanied by their armies would parade through the chanting public who held banners and palm branches.63 In later medieval Christianity, liturgical processions similar to adventus also

63 Mark Humphries, “From Emperor to Pope? Ceremonial, Space, and Authority at Rome from Constantine to Gregory the Great” in Religion, Dynasty, and Patronage in Early Christian Rome, 300-
offered opportunities for the communities to reconstruct the events in their own time and place. Christ’s entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday was symbolically recreated to resemble an imperial adventus; Christ “walked” the earth again in the major processions of the church each year.

This replication of the past through processions is also an important way to understand how the people of the Middle Ages comprehended the Bible. Christians in many areas were offered ample opportunities to reenact the historical events they read in the Bible. By the eleventh century, many Church customaries contained guidelines for the adoption of the adventus rite to a liturgical procession, which became standardized in the reformed Carolingian liturgical texts of the ninth century. During Christ’s Entry into Jerusalem, effectively the first Palm Sunday, Christ was hailed as a triumphant ruler much like the Roman emperors were greeted during their adventus. Recreation of Palm Sunday at Wells Cathedral not only invited crowds to hold palm branches, but also included crowds of sculpted figures on the façade to greet Christ—represented by the Host—as he entered Jerusalem.

The processions of Wells were based on the Sarum rites of England. Old Sarum Cathedral stood in Salisbury before the current cathedral, and its rites were widely used in medieval English church liturgy. According to the Sarum Customary, the Palm Sunday procession was a double feast day but with extra rites specific to Palm Sunday that actually

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900, ed. by Kate Cooper and Julia Hillner (England: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 30. Palm branches would have been held if the emperor was returning from a victorious campaign.
65 Ibid., 21.
66 Ibid., 17, 35. While Fassler’s chapter is about the medieval adventus at Chartres Cathedral in France, much of her information on the origins of adventus and its transformation to liturgical processions is applicable to Wells Cathedral.
began as two processions. On all Sundays, the procession was preceded by the blessing of the salt and water and asperses, the sprinkling of the high altar and of worshipers. On Palm Sunday, the priest carried out the blessing at a side altar before asperses. The first procession group of Palm Sunday, gathered inside the Cathedral for the blessing, asperses, and disbursement of the palm branches, represented the population of Jerusalem. The clergy and worshipers, while singing, followed three crosses that led the procession around the church only to halt at the choir screen to finish the hymn (Figure 19). The procession

Figure 19. Example of an English Procession from the Life of Offa, Procession on a Feast Day, MS # E.1.40/177, © Dublin: Library, Trinity College, 13th century

then went outside the church through the façade’s door and, at the lay cemetery in front of the façade, joined a second procession with banners and a silver crucifix; a member of the

Albert H. Pearson, The Sarum Missal Done into English (England: Church Printing Co., 1884), xliii. A regular Sunday was a single feast day, a different feast day that falls on Sunday (i.e. Christmas, Ascension, or Purification) would make the day a double feast day, and a special feast day that is always on Sunday (i.e. Palm Sunday or Easter) is a double feast day with events specifically associated with that feast.
second procession held the Host, the representation of Christ, and other members carried a
stretcher with relics.\textsuperscript{68} The use of the Host instead of a Gospel book or wooden figure was a
typically English practice.\textsuperscript{69} After the merging of the two processions, a passage from the
Gospel was read and responses were sung before they approached the second station.\textsuperscript{70}

At the second station, the façade of Wells became a participating character in the
drama of the Palm Sunday procession. Not only did it function as a representation of the
gate of the city of Jerusalem that Christ passed through on the first Palm Sunday, but the
façade also provided a stage for the singing of the hymns between the choir and gathered
worshipers. A passageway inside the wall only accessible by a staircase extending from the
triforium above is just large enough for a choir of seven men and boys. Twelve hidden
holes, or oculi, pierce the façade behind the angels in four of the quatrefoils of the bottom
zone (Figure 20). This permitted the voices of the choir to be heard below. Lining up with
the lobes of the quatrefoils, the oculi would have been hidden by the angel sculptures in the
façade’s original state, and the sounds would have seemed to be coming from the angels
(Figure 21).\textsuperscript{71} Seven choristers would stand in the hidden passageway and sing the
Carolingian hymn \textit{Gloria Laus et Honor} to the people gathered on the green in front of the
façade who would then respond in antiphon.\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{68} Terence Bailey, \textit{The Processions of Sarum and the Western Church} (Toronto: Pontifical Institute
for Medieval Studies, 1971), 13-16; Malone, \textit{Façade as Spectacle}, 135-6 n. 15. Although Bailey’s
book recounts the processions per the Sarum rites, Malone states that much of the route changed
for the new cathedrals of Salisbury and Wells due to new architectural structures. The Wells
Consuetudinary makes use of the lay cemetery in front of the façade for the Palm Sunday
procession.

\textsuperscript{69} Sampson, \textit{Wells Cathedral West Front}, 176.

\textsuperscript{70} Johannes Tripps, “From Singing Saints to Descending Angels: Medieval Ceremonies and
Cathedral Facades as Representations of the Heavenly Jerusalem,” \textit{Arte Cristiana} Vol. 93, Issue 826

\textsuperscript{71} Sampson, \textit{Wells Cathedral West Front}, 111. Similar singers’ galleries are found in the English
façades of Salisbury and Lichfield.

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 170.
*Gloria Laus et Honor* was the predominant hymn sung for the Palm Sunday procession in medieval English church liturgy and sung at the second station of the Wells Palm Sunday procession. The hymn translates to:

Glory and praise to you, Christ, Redeemer King to whom children pour out their glad Hosannas. Hail, Israel’s King! Hail, David’s Son confessed! Who comes in the name of Israel’s Lord. The angelic host sings our praise in heaven, on earth humankind, with all created things.⁷³

All of these references to “Israel” in the hymn elevate the façade and its symbolic role as Heavenly Jerusalem, which I will elaborate upon in Chapter Four.

In the top gable, more oculi perforate the spandrels of the arcade above the orders of the angels. Since these oculi are more than seventy-five feet above the ground, they were possibly used for the playing of trumpets (Figures 22 and 23).⁷⁴ Acoustic louvers helped the trumpet noise reach the ground.⁷⁵ Ringing trumpets correspond to the trumpeting angels on the sides of the buttresses that flank the top gable (Figure 6). Trumpets also hail the Second Coming of Christ in the Apocalypse, which the top gable represents. The trumpets would have been sounded at other times during the procession as accents much in the way church bells are used. The trumpet blasts seemingly coming from the sculpture on the façade may have played into the medieval fascination of noises not made by human means.⁷⁶ By combining different sensory perceptions, the

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⁷³ Fassler, "Adventus at Chartres," 32.
⁷⁴ Although the function of these oculi is not absolutely certain, use of them for the blasting of trumpets is a consensus among scholars of Wells Cathedral.
⁷⁵ Tripps, “From Singing Saints,” 8. In the cases of Salisbury and Lichfield, louvers are behind the sculptures in the middle row of niches. Similar ideas contributed to presence of sound and singing at more than just Wells. Hidden passageways are also found at Lindisfarne, Rochester, and St. Botolph’s in Chicester, but no documentation has survived to explain their uses.
⁷⁶ Sampson, *Wells Cathedral West Front*, 112. Sampson surmises that the oculi for trumpets in the arcade spandrels indicates the original plan of the nine orders of the angels to be placed there. He dismisses the supposition that an organ would have been played from this level since the passageway is too high and small. The trumpet players had an unknown but definitely precarious route to reach this level to play trumpets through the oculi. See Sampson’s page 175.
congregation gazing up at the façade was brought to an anagogical experience of emotion by the sounds of singing and the tunes of trumpets wafting down.
The Entry into Jerusalem

The second station, complete with the singing of *Gloria Laus et Honor* and an antiphonal response, was the highlight of the Palm Sunday procession and signaled the Entry into Jerusalem. Members of the clergy raised up the stretcher of relics. Upon passing beneath the relics and the Host and singing *Ingredienta Domina in Sanctam Civilitatem* (the Lord entering into the Holy City), the procession approached the third station at the side door of the façade. As mentioned, the three portals of the façade are smaller than those at contemporary churches in France and were only entered and exited for significant events such as processions, funerals, and the reception of important people. The use of the doors on Palm Sunday signified the Entry into Jerusalem on more than one level. Quite simply, during the Palm Sunday procession, the façade was transformed into the gate to the city of Jerusalem. The worshipers actually entered "Jerusalem" through the façade doors on Palm Sunday to approach the fourth station. With the façade transformed into the city gate of Jerusalem, the interior of the cathedral effectively became Jerusalem translated to England. Accordingly, the façade functions as the city gate of not only Jerusalem, but also of the Heavenly Jerusalem that many cathedrals strived to recreate. Each year, the liturgy of the Palm Sunday procession reminded the public that their cathedral represented the ultimate church of Jerusalem.  

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77 Pamela Z. Blum, “Liturgical Influences on the Design of the West Front at Wells and Salisbury,” *Gesta* Vol. 25 No. 1 (1986): 45-50. Blum’s intriguing thesis states that the doors of English cathedrals such as Wells and Salisbury are smaller than French church façade doors because of the importance of the English liturgical uses of the singers’ galleries. The doors of English façades that include the hidden passageways could not be as large or tall as those in France because the placement of the singers’ galleries would not allow it. To use a twentieth-century idea, the form of the doors is subordinated to the function of the singers’ gallery.

The current choir screen in Wells is not original; nonetheless a connection between the façade as the screen to the nave and the choir screen as the screen to the choir was suggested by the Palm Sunday procession.\(^{79}\) In fact, after the third station at the façade, the Palm Sunday procession culminated at the fourth station at the choir screen. As Christ entered Jerusalem through a door in a gate, the procession entered the church through a door in the façade and the clergy entered the choir through an opening in the screen. Simply put, the façade looks like a monumental choir screen and shares an affinity with its function as well. I have already mentioned the availability of workers who were experienced in sculpting small objects such as reliquaries, tombs, shrines, and choir screens. Their style of sculpting and their use of motifs found in such small objects appear also in the façade. This contributes to the façade’s resemblance to a giant choir screen. Indeed, sculpted busts or bodies in round or foiled openings frequent on the Wells façade are also common in small metalworking, for example the Three Kings Shrine from Cologne (Figure 24). Combining common motifs from smaller sculpture such as choir screens relates the façade not only to a monumental shrine as mentioned above, but also to a monumental choir screen.\(^{80}\) As a result, the general appearance of choir screens influenced the design of the façade, which in turn influenced later choir screens.\(^{81}\) Besides choir screens, the façade of Wells influenced a few later English façades such as the ones at the cathedrals of Salisbury and Exeter (Figures 25 and 26).

The relationship during the processions of the façade to choir screens is apparent—the third station of the Palm Sunday procession at the façade occurred right before the

\(^{79}\) Church, *Chapters in the Early History*, 323.

\(^{80}\) Binski, *Becket’s Crown*, 110. Wells did not follow the common ornamental techniques of small sculpture such as diaper-work, gewgaws, or ornamental heads, but could follow an ornamental practice found more on seals or coins.

\(^{81}\) Malone, *Façade as Spectacle*, 119.
fourth station at the choir screen. Clergy and worshipers together entered through the façade into the church just as the clergy entered through the choir screen to the choir to begin the mass. Therefore, the façade functions as a massive screen through which the procession enters the church, and, during the Palm Sunday procession, also functions as a gate to Jerusalem.

Figure 24. Three Kings Shrine, Cologne, c. 1180, © Rheinisches Bildarchiv

Figure 25. Salisbury Cathedral façade  
c. 1255  

Figure 26. Exeter Cathedral façade  
c. 1350
Mass and Eucharistic Functions

A façade that resembled a massive choir screen would have also reminded worshipers of regular mass. The choir screen was the traditional location from which the clergy would read from the Gospel and the worshipers would receive the Eucharist.\textsuperscript{82} Liturgical practices of ringing bells, or trumpets, at the moment of the elevation of the Host focused the worshipers’ attentions on the choir and the mass.\textsuperscript{83} Partaking in the Eucharist is the point in the mass at which the worshiper is united with the Heavenly Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{84} Since many choir screens also included busts of angels, the angel quatrefoils on the lower zone of the façade, which possibly once held Eucharistic instruments such as chalices, also relate the façade to a choir screen.\textsuperscript{85} Sculpted angels would have signaled the choir of angels surrounding the heavenly altar to the medieval mind. Scenes from the New Testament including Christ feeding the Five Thousand, Christ eating with the Sinners, and the Last Supper would have also been deep reminders of the Eucharist.\textsuperscript{86} Along with the angel busts and New Testament stories, the statues of the community of saints filling the

\textsuperscript{82} Malone, \textit{Façade as Spectacle}, 157. Malone states that by the twelfth century in England, the Eucharist was normally given to the laity at a side altar.
\textsuperscript{83} Karen Nelson, “Architecture and Ritual in the Medieval Procession at Wells Cathedral” (M.A. Thesis, Southern Methodist University, 1994), 36. Bells functioned to beckon men to come together and also symbolized the Old Testament prophets who foretold the Second Coming of Christ—both prophets and the Second Coming of Christ are displayed on the façade. When rung at the beginning of a procession, bells were also thought to keep evil spirits away.
\textsuperscript{84} Malone, \textit{Façade as Spectacle}, 186.
\textsuperscript{85} Binski, \textit{Becket’s Crown}, 111. The angel busts are thought to have been training pieces for sculptors before they moved onto larger sculptures for the façade.
\textsuperscript{86} The Lateran IV Council (Twelfth Ecumenical Council) quashed a heresy—the heretics did not believe that the Host (bread of Eucharist) was actually the Body of Christ. English practice at Wells of using the bread as the Host, or representative of Christ, directly followed the findings of the Lateran IV. The English practice of using the Host to represent Christ aligned the English Church with Lateran IV. Nelson, “Architecture and Ritual,” 42. The festival of Corpus Christi (The Body of Christ) was added to the Sarum church calendar in 1264—texts from the Sarum feast of Corpus Christi go beyond the “body” to mention “meat” and “flesh” strengthening the belief that the Host represented the actual body of Christ.
façade would have made the worshipers feel as if they were united with them in the partaking of the Eucharist.

We have just seen how the façade of Wells cathedral provided a rich backdrop for processions. During burials in the lay cemetery in front of the façade, mourners would have looked to the façade and been reminded of the promise of the end of suffering at the Second Coming of Christ. The resurrection frieze topping the middle zone would have strengthened this promise. Bodies with expressions of joy rose from tombs and confirmed the Church’s promise of salvation for believers. On Palm Sunday, the façade came to life with singing and music during the procession that took place before it. The hidden passageways and oculi for choristers and trumpeters added a striking aural component to the already magnificent visual impact. Furthermore, the act of passing through the façade door to enter the church replicated the entrance into Jerusalem of Christ and echoed the procession’s arrival at the choir screen to begin the mass. References to the Eucharist in the New Testament scenes and the angels of the façade symbolized the Eucharist that would take place not only in the church but also at the heavenly altar. In sum, a façade such as the one at Wells symbolized Christ’s Entry into Jerusalem and the faithfuls’ entry into the Heavenly Jerusalem after the Second Coming.
Chapter 4: Façade as Heavenly Jerusalem

No English church façade so utterly displays a portrayal of the Heavenly Jerusalem—with its inhabitants—as the one at Wells Cathedral. From the ground up, gabled niches filled with statues exhibit a “city of heavenly mansions,” scenes along the central axis elevate the role of the Virgin Mary by relating her to the Church Triumphant and to the Bride of Christ, and the top gable demonstrates a version of the joyful Second Coming of Christ without any reference to the Last Judgment or suffering. Originally painted in the colors of the jewels of the Apocalypse, the façade must have dazzled worshipers before church services and during processions.\(^{87}\) The façade of Wells Cathedral demonstrates a conscious desire on the part of Bishop Jocelin to proclaim the promise of the Heavenly Jerusalem through the Church. In this chapter, I will describe the overall façade in terms of its representation of the Heavenly Jerusalem by investigating the central axis as the Church Triumphant and the Bride of Christ and the top gable as the Second Coming.

**Heavenly Mansions**

Since a gabled niche represented a little house for the statue in ancient Roman times, called an *aedicula*, each gabled niche on the façade of Wells might represent a house for the royal and religious figures and becomes their heavenly mansion promised in the Heavenly Jerusalem.\(^{88}\) Superimposing a gable on top of a niche with a trefoil arch is a distinctly English tradition also found on the twelfth-century monks’ door at Ely Cathedral

\(^{87}\) Sampson, *West Cathedral West Front*. Since Sampson’s book deals with the archaeology of the façade, it includes evidence for the colors used and many images of paint fragments.

\(^{88}\) John 14:2 in the NIV reads, “In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.”
and windows at Canterbury Cathedral, but it is not found on contemporary French church façades (Figures 27 and 28).89 The gabled niche with trefoil arch motif is also derived from shrines and tombs and resembles Wells’s own bishop effigies, a subject discussed in Chapters One and Two. In fact, the transfer of shrine motifs to the façade of Wells fits with the larger “medieval practice of enriching church architecture with shrine motifs to bestow sacred connotations.”90 Wells not only represents the Heavenly Jerusalem in its cathedral architecture, a common medieval practice—through the heavenly mansions, the façade also displays its own inhabited Heavenly Jerusalem.91 Whether on a shrine, tomb, or reliquary, the gabled niche as well as canopies, crockets, and pinnacles were all used to represent the Heavenly Jerusalem.

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89 Malone, Façade as Spectacle, 100. For more on the semiotics of the gabled niche, see Malone’s note 51. Niches with figures are found inside Reims Cathedral in France. They line the inner wall of the façade. On page 11 of this thesis, I suggest that Bishop Jocelin might have witnessed the construction of Reims Cathedral during Interdict. The niches on the interior could have been an inspiration for the niches on the façade of Wells.

90 Ibid., 103.

91 Michael Camille, Gothic Art: Glorious Visions, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), 40. The concept of the inhabited Heavenly Jerusalem comes from Hebrews 12:22. In the New International Version the verse reads, “But you have come to the Heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly...”
To further stress the gabled niche as an integral part of the Heavenly Jerusalem, the twelve gabled niches on the faces of the six buttresses possibly represent the twelve gates of the Heavenly Jerusalem in Revelation 21:12. Quite similar is the vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem in the *Trinity College Apocalypse*, an English illustrated Apocalypse commentary by Berengaudus (Figure 29). In this illumination, three gates frame four sides of a square wall colored blue, red, green, and gold. Each gate seems to be a gabled niche on a buttress much like at Wells. The wall surrounds Christ in Majesty and the Lamb growing from the Tree of Life. An angel bows beneath Christ’s feet, while Saint John the Evangelist and the Angel also appear in the bottom left corner of the illumination gesturing toward the Heavenly Jerusalem. The visual fragility of the non-supportive decorations and corners on the buttresses evoke the light

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92 In the NIV, Revelation 21:12 reads: “It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.”

and airy architecture of the heavenly mansions in the Heavenly Jerusalem (Figure 30).

Many church façades represented the Heavenly Jerusalem by connecting the church’s doors to the gates of the Heavenly Jerusalem; Wells follows the tradition of representing the Heavenly Jerusalem in a unique way by including figural sculpture.⁹⁴

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⁹⁴ Tripps, “From Singing Saints,” 1.
With a statue filling each niche, or heavenly mansion, the façade of Wells is not only populated by the holy apostles and angels, it includes the entire population of the Heavenly Jerusalem. As previously mentioned, Bishop Jocelin populated Wells’s version of the Heavenly Jerusalem with key figures in early and English Church history to strengthen the significance of the Church in England and in Wells and help the worshipers attain an anagogical experience and realize the promise of salvation. This enlarged and expanded version of the Heavenly Jerusalem corresponds to the popular Berengaudus Apocalypse commentary, in which the faithful are consistently perceived as the corporate body of the Church universal. Heavenly Jerusalem is displayed as a truth and would have been understood as a future reality to worshipers in thirteenth-century Wells. This main meaning combined with the central emphasis on the Virgin Mary provides the framework for the façade to emphasize the Church Triumphant.

**The Church Triumphant**

The central axis includes three important figure groups and central icons of Christianity—Enthroned Virgin with Christ, above it the Coronation of the Virgin, and at the top Christ in Majesty. This section will explore the Enthroned Virgin with Christ and the Coronation of the Virgin while the next section will analyze Christ in Majesty. Iconography related to the Virgin Mary became important in the early twelfth century with the rise of the Cult of the Virgin and the sermons of the Cistercian leader Saint Bernard. Devotion to the Virgin Mary was personally important to Bishop Jocelin, who grew up in the church

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95 Ibid., 4.
when the Cult of the Virgin was gaining status. When Gothic art and architecture in many areas of Europe followed this discourse and paid particular attention to scenes elevating the Virgin Mary’s status.

**The Enthroned Virgin with Christ**

The quatrefoil containing the Enthroned Virgin with Christ fills the spandrel of the central door’s pointed arch (Figure 31). Christ sits on the Virgin Mary’s left knee; she wears a gown and mantle and originally held a scepter. The relief on the Virgin Mary’s gown and mantle is higher than that of figures in the niches across the façade, and there is evidence of the use of a drill. Both heads are additions from the 1970s since iconoclasts in the seventeenth century destroyed the original heads (Figures 32 and 33). Today, in the restored sculptures, her head holds a shiny crown and her hand a shiny scepter. Behind the figures is a pattern of drilled holes, which possibly once had gilt stars attached to accentuate the original colors of the scene. The quatrefoil is flanked by censing angels, also headless, that fit snugly into the spandrel created by the quatrefoil, larger pointed arch, and smaller arch over each door (Figure 34).

Voussoirs of the central arch portal are comprised of representations of virtues without their respective vices. This emphasizes the Church’s triumph over evil, an important theme on the façade.

The Enthroned Virgin with Christ signifies the incarnation of Christ: when Christ was born to the Virgin Mary, God was made man. The Virgin Mary was seen as the source of truth of the sacraments of the Church, and the source of Christ himself. The incarnation

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99 During the seventeenth century English civil war, many scenes that did not fit with the beliefs of the reformers were targets for destruction. The Virgin Mary lost her high status during the Protestant reformation.
100 Sampson, *Wells Cathedral West Front*, 81. Sampson states that the censing angels were carved in a similar style to the sculpture on the interior of the church and could have been the first sculpture installed on the façade in the 1220s.
Figure 31. Central Door of Wells Cathedral, © Courtauld Institute

Figure 32. Enthroned Virgin with Christ before restoration, © Courtauld Institute

Figure 33. Enthroned Virgin with Christ after restoration, © Courtauld Institute

Figure 34. Censing Angels of Central Door of Wells Cathedral, © Courtauld Institute
of Christ was the event that started Christianity, and the scenes of the central axis of the façade above the Enthroned Virgin with Christ—the Coronation of the Virgin and the Second Coming—display the incarnation’s aftermath. Furthermore, the Old and New Testament scenes near the central axis display more evidence of the incarnation. It was prefigured by the Creation of Adam, shown two quatrefoils to the south (Figure 14), and represented by the Nativity, shown three quatrefoils to the north. The Virgin Mary was the intermediary between Christians and Christ, and her role in the church increased during the Gothic period. The Enthroned Virgin with Christ could also have been thought of as the First Coming of Christ and is appropriate in the bottom zone of the façade, which displays Old and New Testament figures and stories. The Incarnation of Christ acts as a counterpoint to the Second Coming in the top gable. The Enthroned Virgin with Christ combined with the Coronation of the Virgin emphasizes the central significance of the Virgin to the sculptural program of Wells as the Church Triumphant.

The Coronation of the Virgin

Above the apex of the pointed arch of the central door is the key scene to the façade as the Church Triumphant—a large trefoil gabled niche housing the Coronation of the Virgin (Figure 35). The Virgin Mary is seated to Christ’s honored right side while He crowns her with His right hand. Both of their heads are missing. The degree of relief of the Virgin and Christ is also high, similar to the Enthroned Virgin with Christ; their layered and modulated drapery is the most elaborate of the façade. The Virgin’s foot rests

101 The Nativity scene is in such disrepair that nothing is gained from adding the image here. The two quatrefoils between Saint John the Evangelist and the Nativity are empty. They might have depicted a scene such as the Annunciation.
102 The heads were demolished during the English civil war in the seventeenth century. Depictions of apocryphal events such as The Coronation of the Virgin were main targets for the iconoclasts.
The crowning of the Virgin by Christ as the Queen of Heaven was crucial to the Cult of the Virgin. It gives the Virgin Mary her dual role: as representing Ecclesia or church, she became the bride of Christ. Ecclesia as Christ’s bride aligns her with the Church Triumphant as the bride adorned for her husband at the Second Coming. Thus, the Church is the bride being crowned by her husband as the Queen of Heaven just as the Virgin is crowned in scenes of the Coronation. The Church fathers related Mary to Ecclesia Triumphans (the Church Triumphant), and the widespread sermons that continued to honor and elevate the Virgin Mary’s status are expressed in stone on the Wells façade.

Saint Bernard of Clairvaux was pivotal to the increased devotion to the Virgin Mary. Binski brought up a connection of the façade of Wells to Saint Bernard’s sermon: “My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hollow places of the wall, show me thy face, let thy voice sound in my ears: for thy voice is sweet, and thy face comely.”

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104 Psalm 91:13 in the NIV reads, “You will tread upon the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent.” These symbols also relate Christ and the Virgin Mary to the New Adam and New Eve triumphing over sin.

105 Isaiah 62:5 of the NIV reads, “...as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.” Revelation 21:2 reads, “I saw the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”

106 Binski, Becket’s Crown, 120; Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, “Song of Songs Chapter 2:
associated the church with the bride of Christ. Binski related the clefts in the rock in the sermon to the clefts (niches) of the façade of Wells. He also connected the dove to the bride (the Church Triumphant). Through the Coronation of the Virgin, the façade of Wells becomes the Church Triumphant waiting for the Second Coming of Christ as a bride adorned for her husband.107

Directly above the Coronation of the Virgin in the middle zone are two gabled niches that correlate to the Coronation. As mentioned already in Chapter Two, these niches contain the statues of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba (Figure 36).108 The Queen of Sheba had heard great things of the wisdom of King Solomon and went to see him to ask him many questions. Upon her arrival, she learned many answers from King Solomon and delighted in his wisdom and righteousness. Her visit to King Solomon is seen as foreshadowing the Adoration of the Magi, and both figures are seen as prefiguring the Coronation of the Virgin since Solomon is a king and Sheba a queen.109 Just as the Queen of Sheba went to King Solomon for wisdom and truth, the Church seeks Christ. These key Old Testament figures have long been conceived as corresponding to the Church (Queen of Sheba) and to Christ (King Solomon).110 Since the Virgin Mary is identified with Ecclesia

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107 Malone, Façade as Spectacle, 46. The dedication liturgy of Wells is based on the relationship of the bride and Christ, and the idea is also part of the Sarum Missal and Breviary. Malone’s note 9 states that direct information on the dedication of Wells (or Salisbury) is no longer extant. In the Sarum Missal, one of the verses for the dedication procession is “ubris nova ierusalem descendens spiritualem attulit ornatum lucis ab arce datum.” Loosely translated is, “The new city of Jerusalem descends splendidly clear a living fortress.”

108 The story of the visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon is told in 1 Kings 10:1-13 and 2 Chronicles 9:1-12.

109 Sampson, Wells Cathedral West Front, 158.

110 Another source of imagery is St. Bernard’s Canticle of Canticles in which he relates the bride and bridegroom to Sponsa and Sponsus, making the meaning of the Coronation sponsorial. Exegesis of Bernard’s Canticles is beyond the scope of this thesis, but relationships of Sponsa and Sponsus to
Triumphans, King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba are appropriately placed above the Coronation of the Virgin.

The earthly Church represents the Heavenly Jerusalem coming from heaven as a bride adorned for her husband. The imagery of the Coronation and Marriage would have reminded worshipers of the promise of joy shared with Christ in the Heavenly Jerusalem. With the original paint in the colors of the jewels of the Apocalypse, the façade of Wells would have shimmered much like the image of the Heavenly Jerusalem in the Trinity College Apocalypse (Figure 28). When combined with the image of the Second Coming in the top gable, Wells Cathedral prefigures the Church Triumphant witnessing Christ’s return.

Figure 36. The Queen of Sheba (left) and King Solomon (right)
Wells Cathedral, © Courtauld Institute

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King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba can be found in Malone’s Façade as Spectacle on page 45 and Binski’s Becket’s Crown on page 114. See note 106 above for the sermon citation.
The Second Coming of Christ

At the top of the middle zone, directly under the top gable, stretches the resurrection tier described in Chapter Three. Bodies rise from their tombs in response to the trumpets’ beckon at the Second Coming of Christ. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the resurrection is appropriately placed in the “present” of the middle zone since the bodies have just begun to rise from their earthly tombs. Right above the tier, the arcade with the trumpet oculi and the nine orders of the angels represent the trumpeting angels that will herald the rising of the bodies at the Second Coming of Christ. All of the resurrected are rising in joy before ascending into the Heavenly Jerusalem, and the top gable emphasized Christ in Majesty rather than Christ in Judgment.

This theophanic, apocalyptic sculptural program without an emphasis on the Last Judgment is unique to Wells Cathedral and must be explained. Unlike earlier and contemporary French church façades, Wells has no Last Judgment scene of the separation of the saved and the damned. The lack of Last Judgment is purposeful since it is normally a prevalent scene on Romanesque and Gothic church façades. On those French churches, the Coronation of the Virgin is usually paired with a scene of Last Judgment complete with angels and devils. At Wells, the Coronation of the Virgin is connected to the moment when the Heavenly Jerusalem descends from heaven as a bride adorned for her husband from Revelation 21:2-4 rather than the later scene of Christ in judgment over the saved and damned.

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111 See note 58 on page 33.
112 Malone, Façade as Spectacle, 72.
113 Binksi, Becket's Crown, 115. At Wells, it seems as if the first resurrection of Revelation 20:4-6 was used as a basis for the resurrection tier rather than the more common second resurrection in Revelation 20:11-15. The first resurrection is of those who had not worshiped the beast or received his mark and reigned with Christ for the next millennium. The second resurrection is that of those who were being judged according to their deeds and recordings in the book of life. Revelation 20:4 is a source for the joyous imagery. In the NIV, it reads, “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”
damned. Instead of concentrating on scenes of damnation to scare the people into righteous living, the Wells façade focused on scenes of salvation and happiness to reinforce the promises made to those who worshiped and praised Christ. The French façades are not a representation of the Heavenly Jerusalem like Wells, but rather an encyclopedic vision of the world. Since the façade of Wells combines a portrayal of the Heavenly Jerusalem with the Church Triumphant, it should exhibit joyfulness.

In the top gable, Christ is seated in a round cusped mandorla flanked by two trefoil-arched niches (Figure 37). Until the 1980s, only the bottom half of Christ’s body had survived through the centuries, and the flanking niches had lost their sculptures. During restoration, Christ’s body was replaced, and two seraphim were inserted into the flanking niches (Figure 38). As mentioned before, possible inhabitants for these niches were the Virgin Mary and Saint John the Baptist (the Deesis) or censing angels similar to those found flanking the Enthroned Virgin with Christ above the central door. The twelve apostles, with Matthias rather than Judas, occupy the twelve niches below Christ. Below the apostles are the nine orders of the angels portraying the guardian angels who will defend the Heavenly Jerusalem.

At the moment of the Second Coming, trumpets will sound, represented by the trumpeting angels and trumpet oculi above the nine orders of the angels, and bodies will rise from their tombs. The figures in all of the niches are the witnesses to the Second Coming of Christ. With the central axis focusing on the triumph of the Church through the

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114 The original sculpture of the bottom half of Christ is now in the Wells museum.
115 Sampson, *Wells Cathedral West Front*, 167; Tudor-Craig, “Wells Sculpture,” 114. Although the niches of the top gable were not filled until the fifteenth century, due to the framing, scholars and the archives of Wells Cathedral agree that the current sculptures were in Jocelin’s original plans. A lack of funding after Jocelin’s death could have contributed to the incompletion of the top gable.
116 Tripps, “From Singing Saints,” 1.
Incarnation and Coronation of the Virgin, the façade brandishes the promise of salvation for Christians that will be confirmed at the Second Coming of Christ.

Figure 37. Christ in Majesty prior to restoration
Top Gable of Wells Cathedral, © Courtauld Institute

Figure 38. Top Gable of Wells Cathedral after Restoration
© Alec and/or Marlene Hartill, The Hartill Archive of Architecture and Allied Arts
A similar vision of the Second
Coming of Christ and the Church
Triumphant is found in a twelfth-century
illumination from a manuscript made in
Canterbury of Saint Augustine’s *City of God*
onece in the library of Wells (Figure 39). At the apex of the gable, Christ in Majesty
gives a gesture of blessing and is
surrounded by two rows of angels and
apostles. Christ’s mandorla is painted as if
a sky, illustrating Christ’s place in the
heavens. Under the row of apostles, the
Virgin Mary sits on her throne surrounded
by figures. Although not a scene of the
Coronation of the Virgin, the theme of the illumination still emphasizes the triumph of the
Church. Like at Wells, devils, fear, and Last Judgment have been left out. Saint Augustine
emphasizes the role of people and souls in the Heavenly Jerusalem leading to the inclusion
of the figures inhabiting the façade’s niches. Although the façade of Wells is a more
expansive version of the manuscript illumination as it includes many more historical and
significant Church figures, many visual connections are made to the possible source of the
façade imagery in this illumination. The façade, however, is more than Saint Augustine’s

Figure 39. *City of God* © Canterbury, Biblioteca Laurenziana, The Image Gallery, MS # cod. 17: fol. 2v. c. 1110

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117 Tudor-Craig, “Wells Sculpture,” 119. St. Augustine’s *City of God* was a well-known text in the Middle Ages and was given to the Wells library by one of its chancellors, so its ideas, as well as the illumination, are a possible source for the imagery of the façade. Malone also stresses the connection to *City of God.*
City of God; by including many more figures, the façade expands and expounds upon the
City of God. The façade at Wells is, among many things, a very English “City of God.”

As a whole, the façade of Wells is a representation of the glorious resurrection in the
Heavenly Jerusalem. Resembling a massive choir screen, the façade would have recalled
the Eucharist distributed at the choir screen inside the church. The Eucharist, of course, is
the sacrament in which the earthly Church and the Heavenly Church unite as one.
Partaking in the Eucharist was important to worshipers in attaining salvation. In
anticipation of the Second Coming and the Heavenly Jerusalem, the Church partakes in the
sacraments to ensure salvation. Malone concludes, “The fusion of a sculptural program
depicting the Heavenly Jerusalem with a choir-screen entrance on the façade was able to
signal in visual terms the union of heaven and earth, made manifest at the Eucharist.”
The importance of salvation through sacraments was a reality to medieval worshipers, just
as deeply engrained as the promise of the Second Coming. The physical façade, culminating
in the Christ’s return in the top gable, embodies the last moment in earthly history and
stands as a substitute for the Second Coming until the end of time.

\[\text{In John 6:54 of the NIV, “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day,” the promise of salvation through the Eucharist is made clear.}\]
\[\text{Malone, Façade as Spectacle, 228.}\]
Chapter 5: Concluding Thoughts

The sculptural program of Wells Cathedral was expansive and carefully devised and therefore provokes interpretation and analysis. It was the first of its kind in England—a screen façade full of sculpted figures from Church and English history. My thesis interpreted the façade in relation to three main functions it fulfilled—to help regain the bishopric, to aid in Church liturgy and processions, and to represent the Heavenly Jerusalem. I have tried to emphasize the uniquely English qualities of the façade’s planning and construction by analyzing the figures represented and stressing how the façade related to English Church history and liturgy.

In Chapter One, I introduced the contents of my thesis and my approach to research. To lay the foundation for my thesis, I recounted the theses and approaches of the main scholarly sources I consulted. I then provided a historical backdrop that led to the construction of the façade and described its appearance. By tracing significant historical events, I articulated how important events resulted in the specific features of the façade. The principle patron, Bishop Jocelin applied information from the Historiola including the episcopal effigies in his plans to recoup the bishopric. By describing the façade’s overall appearance, I introduced the specific features I would expand upon in the subsequent chapters. The state of the scholarship of the Wells Cathedral façade, the historical backdrop of Wells, and the description of the façade set up the interpretation and analysis of the façade’s appearance and functions in the next three chapters.

In Chapter Two, I concentrated on the bottom and middle zones of the façade. The niches included statues of figures important to early Christian and English church history. The English figures were chosen because of their significance to the history of Wells.
Bishop Jocelin, after all, was locked in competition with the nearby abbeys of Glastonbury and Bath to secure the bishopric of Somerset. Not only wishing to secure more money and power for Wells, he also recognized the importance of a monumental façade to attract worshipers and strengthen Wells’s reputation, and he gambled that this would bolster his campaign to reestablish the bishopric back in his hometown after it had been removed by the Normans. The Biblical figures of martyrs, preachers, disciples, and prophets helped connect the kings, bishops, monks, priests, and abbots of the English church to the history of the early Christian Church. The quatrefoils containing scenes from the Old and New Testaments provided more Biblical history in the drive to heighten the status and legacy of Wells. The connection of the English Church history to the Biblical figures and scenes helped to elevate the importance of the English Church history at Wells. Jocelin’s gamble proved successful.

Chapter Three focused on the liturgical uses for the façade and two main processions that occurred at Wells Cathedral. Funeral processions began inside the church and exited through the façade’s door to approach the lay cemetery on the green. The mourners had a direct view of the theme of resurrection in the tier at the top of the middle zone. On Palm Sunday, when Christ’s Entry into Jerusalem was reenacted, the façade was transformed into the city gate of Jerusalem. The oculi for singing and trumpet playing provided a direct connection of the façade to the Palm Sunday procession that took place in front of the church. Similar sculptural motifs found on the façade and church furnishings like choir screens served to connect the façade to the Eucharist and regular masses that occurred at the choir screen inside the church. Whether attending a funeral in the cemetery or a joyous celebration on Palm Sunday, the façade provided a focal point for worship and reminded the people of the Church’s promise of salvation.
Lastly, in Chapter Four, I investigated the scenes on the central axis of the façade and the top gable as a representation of the Heavenly Jerusalem. The gabled niches present throughout the façade have been interpreted as the heavenly mansions that each believer will possess in the Heavenly Jerusalem. On the central axis, the Enthroned Virgin with Christ and the Coronation of the Virgin prove the special devotion of worshipers to the Virgin Mary that began in the twelfth century. The Enthroned Virgin with Christ displayed Christ’s Incarnation while the Coronation of the Virgin portrayed the Virgin’s status in heaven as queen. The interpretation of the Virgin as Queen of Heaven relates her to the Church Triumphant which is also the bride of Christ. In the Book of Revelation, the bride of Christ is the church that awaits His Second Coming adorned as a bride for her husband. Since the central axis is focused on the Church as the bride of Christ, the façade also represents the Church Triumphant at the Second Coming of Christ. The top gable, with Christ in Majesty, angels, and apostles, provides a representation of the Second Coming which, combined with the Church Triumphant, fulfills the subject of the façade as the Heavenly Jerusalem.

Throughout this thesis, I have chosen not to compare the façade of Wells to other façades in England. This has been purposeful. I have looked at other English church façades, but have not found an earlier church with a strong enough visual connection to Wells. A comparison can be made to one slightly later English church—Salisbury. Salisbury’s façade includes niches, sculpture, and a singer’s gallery mentioned in Chapter Three. Comparison can also be made with the façade of Exeter Cathedral, but this façade was constructed at least one hundred years later in the mid-fourteenth century. I could have mentioned a closer visual relationship with Exeter, but I wanted to focus on the sources of the sculpture and concepts at Wells, not the churches that Wells influenced.
Although I have mentioned ideological connections to earlier and contemporary French churches, I have not found such relationships to churches in England beyond those mentioned above. I suggest that the scarcity of connections I have found goes to prove the extent to which the façade of Wells was unique.

The origins for the imagery at Wells probably came from small objects. Shrines, reliquaries, tombs, and choir furnishings have all been mentioned as exhibiting similar motifs, for example gabled niches, quatrefoils, and trefoil arches. The origins of many of these motifs can be found in Ancient Roman Imperial architecture and wall painting and probably came to Wells through traveling small objects. For example, illuminations in manuscripts, such as the *Trinity College Apocalypse* and the *City of God*, could have been a possible source for the façade of Wells.

Future study on the façade of Wells Cathedral could include researching the cathedral’s archives to find evidence of what occurred in the town around the church after the façade’s completion. More comparisons to similar churches, such as Salisbury Cathedral, could yield information to understand the broader context in which Wells was built. Also, further investigation of the processional uses of façades in England could help place mystery and morality plays, which became popular in the centuries to come, in front of the façade at Wells. Each of these avenues would broaden the scope of knowledge on Wells and, in turn, medieval art and architecture.

By focusing on three main functions of the façade of Wells Cathedral, we can understand the important roles that church façades served to not only contemporary worshipers, but also throughout the Middle Ages. While contemporary French church façades focused on a Last Judgment to remind worshipers of righteous living, Wells Cathedral portrayed joyous scenes of resurrection, important historical figures, and Christ
in Majesty. A wide screen façade such as the one at Wells was an appropriate format for a display of figures and scenes that are part of the Church Triumphant. Patronage and the competition for the bishopric played an important role in the planning of the sculptural program on the façade. Church liturgy provided a part for the façade to play in processions and masses. As a representation of the Heavenly Jerusalem, the façade delivered a monumental version of the Church Triumphant to attract worshipers and remind them of the Second Coming of Christ. All in all, the façade served these three main functions in an innovative way unique to Wells Cathedral and greatly contributed to medieval art.
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Vita

Alexandra Leigh Pearson was born in Metairie, Louisiana, in 1979. She lived in Leland, Mississippi, and Fayetteville, Arkansas, before returning to Louisiana for college. She began her college career at Loyola University New Orleans but graduated from Louisiana State University in 2004 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in ceramics. After taking time off to join the AmeriCorps volunteer program, to travel, and to paint, she returned to Louisiana State University to pursue a Master of Arts degree in art history. She concentrated in medieval art under Nick Camerlenghi and will receive her Master of Arts degree in May of 2009. She hopes to work in arts education.